



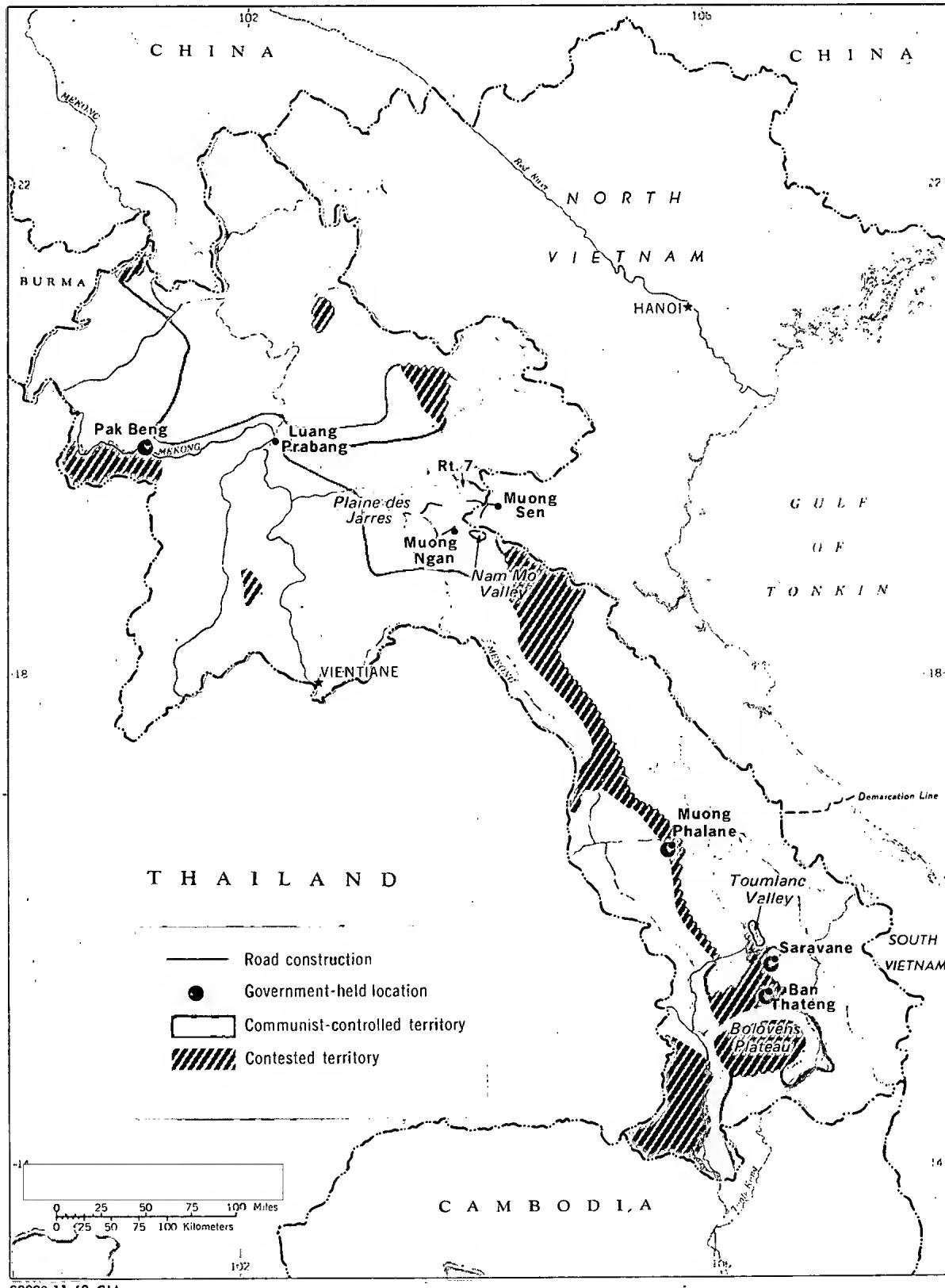
The President's Daily Brief

~~Top Secret~~ 19 November 1968



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LAOS: Current Situation



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THE PRESIDENT'S
DAILY BRIEF
19 NOVEMBER 1968

1. Laos

The military situation is heating up as the Communists begin to put on the pressure in northern Laos. North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao troops have captured a number of outlying defensive positions in southwestern Luang Prabang Province. The Communists are also demonstrating new interest in government guerrilla positions near the North Vietnamese border south of Route 7. Three North Vietnamese battalions have recently deployed into Laos in this area.

In the south, the enemy is still active near Muong Phalane, but recent heavy casualties seem to have slowed their efforts.

Government forces are moving to clear enemy forces east of Ban Thateng as part of a longer range effort to ease the Communist threat in the Bolovens Plateau area. The North Vietnamese are extremely sensitive to encroachments into the vital infiltration corridor, however, and a sharp rebuff to government plans will probably not be long in coming.

2. France

De Gaulle has told Couve to ride out the wave of speculation against the franc, but some deflationary measures are being ordered up nonetheless. The size of the crunch will be known when Couve goes before the National Assembly today.

3. Soviet Union

The Soviets' recent purchase of color television technology and equipment in the US should permit them to begin mass production of color sets by 1970. By 1975 they will likely turn out 1 to 1.5 million color sets a year.

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4. Soviet Union

Zond-6 landed in the Soviet Union
on Sunday and was probably picked up
[redacted] after an extensive
search.

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5. Nigeria -
Communist China

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FOR THE PRESIDENT'S EYES ONLY

- 1.) Special Daily Report on North Vietnam
- 2.) North Vietnamese Reflections of U S
Political Attitudes

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19 November 1968

Special Daily Report on North Vietnam
for the President's Eyes Only

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I. NOTES ON THE SITUATION

Propaganda: Hanoi's propaganda handling of issues surrounding the bombing halt has been extremely cautious. The North Vietnamese publicly acknowledge only one "understanding"--the agreement to expand the talks. Any other conditions or understandings are ignored or brushed off with the assertion that the US "unconditional" bombing halt met basic Communist demands for progress in Paris. Hanoi's moves since 1 November suggest an intent to continue denying any commitment to military restraint, while keeping Communist military activities limited enough to avoid US retaliation and at least temporarily within the bounds of what was agreed to in Paris.

The most recent instance of this approach came in Hanoi's response to a State Department protest of 13 November over North Vietnamese abuse of the Demilitarized Zone. Hanoi answered the charges on 16 November in a foreign ministry statement which avoided any implication of mutual commitments to restraint by saying that the US was trying to make the world believe that Hanoi had accepted conditions for a bombing halt. Turning the accusations around, the statement said the US was attacking the Demilitarized Zone in violation of the 1954 Geneva Agreements. It made no mention, of course, of any understandings in Paris.

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Ha Van Lau Comments on Timing of Cease-fire Discussions: Ha Van Lau has suggested an agenda for the expanded talks in Paris which includes first the withdrawal of US troops, then consideration of a political settlement in South Vietnam, and finally a cease-fire. In an interview with a French magazine this past weekend, Lau gave the usual exposition of Hanoi's line on terms for a settlement, but he went out of his way to lay to rest the rumor that the

Communists intend to work for an immediate cease-fire in the next round of negotiations. He was quite specific in his timing, saying that a cease-fire was "unrealistic" before the issues of withdrawal or a political settlement have been resolved.

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"New" North Vietnamese Missile?: On 6 November the Special Report noted the possibility that the North Vietnamese may be employing a new antiaircraft missile. Further analysis of this "new" missile's performance, as reported by the North Vietnamese themselves in intercepted communications, suggests that the "new" missile's range and velocity do not differ significantly from those of the standard Soviet missiles long in use in North Vietnam. It appears that the "new" aspect may be a modified fuzing and warhead system.

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Relations with Sweden: Sweden has decided to grant diplomatic recognition to Hanoi but will await developments in Paris before taking definite action, according to an assessment by the US Embassy in Stockholm. An aide to the Swedish foreign minister told an embassy official that recognition was necessary to allow Scandinavian participation in Vietnam's postwar economic development. Recognition at this time would embarrass the US in Paris, he acknowledged, but he said that when the talks seem to be heading toward a settlement, Sweden will go ahead with its plans.

The aide reported that Stockholm has expressed to Hanoi and the Front the view that disparate elements, including the Front, Alliance, and right-wing Catholics in South Vietnam, should have a voice in a postwar settlement.

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II. NORTH VIETNAMESE REFLECTIONS OF US POLITICAL ATTITUDES ON THE WAR

There is nothing of significance to report today.

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